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WILLIAM MAYNE DUNCANSON.

WILLIAM MAYNE DUNCANSON.

By ALLEN C. CLARK.

(Read before the Society February 8, 1910.)

When the subject of this sketch first blinked at the daylight I don't know—nor where. The vessel swung into the Battery; the gang-plank was thrown in place, and that day in August, 1794, William Mayne Duncanson, —Captain Duncanson—first stepped on the American shore. Over the main came with the Captain, Thomas Law. In India, the Captain had been a marine merchant and his fellow voyager, a governor. The Captain located at 48 Broad Street and Mr. Law, 47 Broadway. Neighbors were James Greenleaf at 112 Liberty and James Ray at 134 Greenwich. Mr. Ray also had adventures in India.

Not only these, other Anglo-Indians, who had been moguls in India met upon the thoroughfares of the Federal City, among them, William Duane, a journalist, and James Barry, a merchant. Then actually was the East India Company with headquarters in Philadelphia. These adventurers came not with empty exchequers.

“And now approach'd their fleet from India, fraught
With all the riches of the rising sun.
And precious sand from southern climates brought.”

Dryden.

In the land of golden light and golden sands they gleaned golden harvest and they came with dreams of greater golden gathering. Where were silence, swamps and stumps, they saw in visions, bazaars, temples and

mosques, and in the city, squares lined in ink on paper—compounds of East Indian grandeur and gorgeousness. The dreams were delusions; the life of Duncanson is story of all.

The Captain was straight and of attractive build—tall and narrow. His coat was scarlet with wide trimmings and high collar in buff, garnished with great buttons big as medals of honor and golden epaulettes, a ruffled shirt and a blue stock. He had bright hazel eyes, high cheek bones, a high forehead and a height of powdered brown hair with a queue, of course, behind. He looked for all the world like General Burgoyne in the rotunda of the Capitol surrendering the sword.

Duncanson ventured the fortunes of the sea. A *sea-captain* is a title that fits him well, and so let him be. But when Duncanson, absorbed in fond recollection of dress parade, donned his regimentals with golden braid and his cap with the glittered band and buckled his belt around and in the holster fitted his pistol and in the hanger fixed his scabbard and sword and then stood erect and absently cried, "Attention!" he, looked very much like a *land captain*; as he was. And, indeed, it is not romancing to relate that the Captain in these drawing room reviews was reminded of the gala affairs when in gay accoutrement he aroused admiration and the acclaim:

"See, now comes the captain all daub'd with gold lace;
O la! the sweet gentleman! look in his face;
And see how he rides like a lord of the land,
With the fine flaming sword that he holds in his hand,
And his horse, the dear *criter*, it prances and rears,
With ribbons in knots at its tail and its ears." *Swift.*

Now Duncanson had

"Long galleries of ancestors."

"Old captains and dictators of their race."

Dryden.

And of the gentility he inherited "from dead men's dust and bones" he did not squander, rather added to the principal. Of an early branch was William Duncanson, a military adherent of the house of Argyll, the ninth earl, and the William Mayne, who visited him, is creditably the Baron Newhaven. Captain Duncanson had respectable antecedents and he had good education—he phrased correctly and penned boldly. The Captain soon after his arrival was joined by his sister, Miss Martha Duncanson and her friend, Lydia Knott.

James Greenleaf, Robert Morris and John Nicholson, a syndicate, had contracted to purchase of the lots in the city of Washington, eighty-five hundred or forty-two per cent of all. For the syndicate, Greenleaf was the executive. He, as stated, was a neighbor of Duncanson and Law in that part of Manhattan where now the towers reach cloudland. Greenleaf was sanguine and persuasive and had Law so enthused that within four months of his advent in America, he invested \$133,333 in Washington lots with the option to purchase or to loan upon them as security.

Greenleaf, a native of Boston, was the United States consul at Amsterdam. He was a merchant with stores in New York and Amsterdam; a stock speculator in American and Dutch securities. For schemes he was a genius; a diplomat for he had adroitness and assurance. To his local agent, Cranch, he makes Law, himself, the bearer of the message that he is to be as clay in the potter's hands—that is the reading under the lines:

Philad^a, 17 Feb^y, 1795.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

My particular & beloved friend Mr. Thomas Law will bear this to you—as I have repeatedly expressed to you how nearly I have at heart to unite Mr. Law's talents & efforts to yours, in the promotion of my favorite object, the federal establish-

ment, I shall forbear repetition; but beg only that you would receive Mr. Law as one who is deserving your warmest friendship & confidence, & who possesses mine in an unlimited degree & that you would practice every possible endeavor to render his residence at the City Comfortable & agreeable.

Mr. L. will probably be accompanied by his friend Duncanson whom I also recommend to your kind attentions—

With regard to the selection of Lots for Mr Law you will have due reference to what has passed thereon in writing observing nevertheless that it is essential to my happiness that Mr. L. should be pleased with his purchase & with your manner of conducting towards him in the selection of the property to be transferred to him—

believe me with truth & affection

your

JAMES GREENLEAF

WILLIAM CRANCH, ESQ., City of Washington.

Law and Duncanson came together. They arrived February 23, 1795, and on the day following the letter was handed to Cranch with another dated, December 20, 1794

It may be urged that the Law-Duncanson-Cranch correspondence is trivial, without interest or historical value. Having from divers and diverse sources succeeded in collecting it complete I make bold to include it all. It teaches at least that the cleverest diplomacy is that of plate and glass and knife and fork. It shows that the surest success in large land deals is in summoning that ally, none other

“Than that all softening, overpowering knell.
The tocsin of the soul—the dinner-bell.”

Byron.

To Cranch.

(Wednesday, February 25, 1795.)

DEAR SIR:

If you are disengaged to-morrow, will you favor M^r Duncanson & me with your company to dinner at 3 o'clock.

I shall esteem it a favor if you could oblige me with a mem^m of the Lots you could allow me the option of, & with information when it is convenient for me to wait upon you—

I remain

D^r Sir

Y^{rs} m^t Ob^y

THO^s LAW,

Feb. 25th 1795

TH^s. LAW ESQ^r

D^r Sir:

I will with pleasure accept your polite invitation to dine to-morrow & will take with me the papers from which I shall form the mem^m you request. If you will ride over the ground noted to you in Mr. Greenleaf's mem^m I will call upon you at 12 o'clock for that purpose. Shall I have the fav^r of the company of you & Mr. Duncanson to dine on friday 2 ° Clock.

I am D Sir,

Your obed^t Serv^t

W. CRANCH.

Cranch to Greenleaf.

February 27, 1795.

He seems pleased with the city, and some very great alterations must take place in his ideas before he will consent to relinquish his purchase—Captⁿ Duncanson has said something of making a purchase upon the same terms with those of Mr. Law—perhaps I shall make a contract of the same kind with him.

CITY OF WASHINGTON, MARCH 1, 1795

THOS. LAW ESQ.

D^r Sir:

I am obliged to meet Messrs Morris, Nicholson & Greenleaf in Philada before 10th instant. I am therefore as anxious as you can be to complete your selection.

with respect &c I am Sr.

Yr obedt

W. CRANCH

I hope for the pleasure of meeting you at Mr. Young's at dinner.

CITY WASHINGTON, 3^d MARCH 1795

DEAR SIR:

Will you sell to me the amount of from Eight to twenty thousand pounds Pennsylvania Currency of square feet in the City of Washington to be selected by me, from all the squares you have given M^r Law at Latitude to choose from (excepting those lots which M^r Law has now chosen) at the rate of five pence Pennsylvania Currency p^r Square foot, & subject to the exact Tenor of M^r Laws articles of Agreement with Mess^{rs} Morris, Nicholson & Greenleaf—I also wish to know, such part as I may not be able to give ready money for, at what periods of instalments, you would fix the residue—

The terms of payment I can propose. As I must go to New York to Sell Stock &c for ready money— A note payable one month after date & it will be good that time before I can have inspected my Lotts—D^o of the residue one 3^d in six months—and the remainder of the residue, one year without interest.

I am Dear Sir

Your most obe^t S^t

W. M. DUNCANSON.

M^r W. CRANCH, City of Washington.

William Mayne Duncanson.

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CITY OF WASHINGTON, MARCH 3^d, 1795.

CAPTⁿ DUNCANSON,

Dear SIR:

I have the pleasure of receiving yours of this date—I accept & agree to the proposals made by you—you give your note payable in one month for seven thousand pounds M^d C^y—your note for one third of the residue of the amount of the Lots you may select payable in six months, and your note payable in one year for the residue of said Amount, the whole without interest.

I am, Sir,

your obed^t Serv^t

W. CRANCH.

I will expect your final Answer on next thursday morning.

W. C.

CITY OF WASHINGTON, 5, MARCH, 1795.

DEAR SIR:

Agreeable to your letter of the 3^d instant I have examined the squares from which Mr. Law will be entitled to choose his number of Lots, and after he has chosen there will remain in those squares none equal in value to Mr. Law^s—In fact for his Choice I would with pleasure give six pence sooner than four pence, for that I am to choose, after him, I therefore leave to yourself whether my choice is equally four pence as Laws is five pence per square foot; and in every other respect agreeable to the Tenor of my Letter of the third to you; on these grounds I am ready to conclude the agreement before you go.

I am D^r Sir

Your most ob^t Ser^t

W. M. DUNCANSON.

CAPTⁿ DUNCANSON

D^r Sir:

I rec^d your fav^r of this date and think there is some justice in your observations as yours will be only a Second Choice and if Mess Morris, Nicholson and Greenleaf should not think their

Sale to Mr Law as too cheap, I think there can be little doubt of their complying with your propositions—But as my authority does not allow me to Sell under 5^d p^r-Sq—foot I cannot absolutely agree to them. I will however assent to them, subject to the ratification or disavowal of Mess^{rs} Morris, Nicholson & Greenleaf.

I am Sir, your obed^t

W. CRANCH.

CITY OF WASHINGTON,

5 March 1795

at noon

D^r Sir

I have received your letter of this date & agreee to it on these conditions, confident of the liberality of Messrs Morris, Nicholson & Greenleaf.

I am &c.

W. M. DUNCANSON.

Most favorably impressed with a glimpse of the city of promise they returned to Philadelphia, Law to confirm his option of purchase, Duncanson to secure a similar. Duncanson's option is in the handwriting of Mr. Cranch. It is the property of Thomas P. Woodward, Esq. It is a remarkable document as it bears the autographs of the entire syndicate, besides that of Duncanson, and of Cranch. Duncanson gave notes to the amount of £20,000, Maryland currency; £7,000 payable thirty days, £4,333 $\frac{1}{3}$, six months and £8,666 $\frac{2}{3}$ one year, with the understanding he could ratify or reject his purchase, wholly or partially, and receive the notes unpaid and lots in proportion to amount paid. He paid the notes first and second due, amounting to \$30,222.22 and declined payment of the third \$23,111.11. At 5 fr. per sq. ft. which within an inconsiderable fraction was conveyed to him.

At Greenleaf's urgent solicitation Duncanson, April 23, 1795, made a second optional purchase of 800,000 sq. ft. drawing drafts on parties in London for £12,000 Maryland currency. The idea was if the Londoners agreed to invest they would accept the paper. They declined the investment and Duncanson demanded rescission. Captain Duncanson writes Mr. Greenleaf, September 11, 1795, that the gentlemen in England are averse to purchase in the city of Washington and that he relinquishes the option; he reminds Greenleaf of his promise to protect his bills from which he derived no advantage and suggests the precaution of security from risk. On the day after Duncanson's letter, Morris, Nicholson and Greenleaf executed to him a deed, an intended second mortgage, of property to which Law already had a deed, an intended first mortgage. The notes secured were \$23,111.11 made by Duncanson under the first option, and drafts £12,000 drawn on the second. These notes and drafts were all paid, the latter by Greenleaf.

Mr. Morris to Captain Duncanson was grateful for his accommodation and frequently expressed his gratitude and once, November 24, 1796, thus:

He certainly deserves anything we can do for him in return for his friendly Conduct.

Greenleaf in other years in a *Caution*, as he caps his tirades, discusses Duncanson's transactions with the triumvirate. The *Caution* is not altogether truthful nor altogether grateful. Greenleaf's ingratitude had an excuse in that Duncanson was cajoled by Ward to attempt sale for the drafts uncanceled yet actually paid. From this arose an injunction *Pratt vs. Duncanson and Ward*—the first equity cause in this jurisdiction—No. 1, Docket 1.

From business differences arose animosity and a duel between Duncanson and Greenleaf. We, who are ac-

quainted with the scriptures, will recall that more than a thousand years before the Christian era (1060 B. C.) duellers have decided the issue; and that while the Philistine hosts and the hosts of Israel stood on opposite mountains "the champion" (the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name) in the valley Terebinth was a tall target for the diminutive David's sling. Clever men, celebrated men, through the centuries, and in this country until seventy years since have resorted to deadly encounter to establish honor. That dexterity and nerve can be the criterion of right or vindication is now in public opinion false and the opinion has strong second in the statutes of the States.

The interview between Duncanson and Greenleaf was in the first week of October, 1798, with witnesses quite a number of gentlemen. The space was paced off in the city of Washington or near by it. Col. Presley Thornton "bred in the same military service" as Duncanson, was his second; and George Walker, Duncanson's former friend, was Greenleaf's second. Duncanson was the challenger.

From Mr. Greenleaf's public letter of January 15, 1799 in the *Centinel of Liberty* of Georgetown:

"The charge made by me of unmanliness and want of courage on his part, (though justified by former transactions) produced in its consequences a challenge and a duel. The detail of what took place between us on the field has been variously stated: but it is not now my business to remark on the contradictions that offer in those statements; it suffices, that they all agree in the following important points:—that Capt. Duncanson and myself did meet for the purpose of fighting—that at the third signal for firing, his pistol snapped without exploding—that though possessing the right to fire, I forebore until his other pistol was handed him—that it was declared by his second, an unwarrantable act, if he gave another fire, until after receiving my reserved fire—that I declined availing myself of the advan-

tage I possessed, and that we quitted the field, Capt. D. without wiping off the stigma I had attached to him, and myself dissatisfied at not having freed society from an unworthy member.

It was not until my return to Maryland, that the injurious publications, that have appeared through the channels of your paper, came to my hand; and my determination was not to degrade myself by replying to them, but confound them by demanding a second interview. Capt. Duncanson and myself met at Annapolis on the 4th instant, on the next day I sent him a challenge . . . requiring satisfaction for his false and malicious publications, . . . he disgracefully declined the meeting . . . A few days after, we both returned to Washington, and I immediately sent him by a friend upon whom I could rely, a verbal message . . . He declined to receive the message . . . assigning for reason . . . that he thought me 'unworthy.'

"From the intimate knowledge I possess of Capt. D's propensities, I shall expect, on his part, in consequence of this publication, the groundless and abusive assertions, of a man devoid of truth, rectitude, and honor; I shall expect from him, the loud but harmless vauntings, of a braggart, but I shall look for no one manly act, or for aught that can in its most remote effects, raise him in my estimation."

These are a few paragraphs of Greenleaf's lofty billingsgate.

Colonel Presley Thornton, Duncanson's second, in the *Centinel of Liberty*, espoused the version of the principal, Greenleaf. He concludes a commendatory communication:

"If my opinion is in any wise essential for your further satisfaction I have no hesitation in declaring that I consider you a man of honor and a gentleman, and under that impression, if, Sir, on reflection you conceive you have sustained any injury from me individually I am willing to repair and give you satisfaction in any manner."

It appears by this conclusion that in the duelling days life was matched with the most trivial affairs.

The feeble snap of Captain Duncanson's pistol had hardly died away before the duel had consequence. The consequence was, I know not what then called but in the inelegance of this day's degenerate English, would be hot air. The columns, channels then, of the public prints teemed with fierce denunciation. George Walker, Greenleaf's second, was so swiftly in print that from the unsanguinary field he must have rode, and wrote as he rode, straight to the shop of the newspaper. He appeared in the channels October the 9th and the 18th and with praiseworthy impartiality had an account pleasing to Greenleaf and displeasing to Duncanson, and the other, pleasing to Duncanson and displeasing to Greenleaf. Captain Duncanson did not neglect newspaper publication, nobody connected with the affair seemed to, even the participants by pretence only maintained their honor by fighting with ink. Captain Duncanson threatened to write a pamphlet, perhaps he did. Various communications are in the *Centinel of Liberty*. Hugh T. Taggart, Esq., has this newspaper treasure and had the courtesy to let me take from it. The *Centinel* was not the only channel, the *Alexandria Times* was too. And doubtless all the contemporaries had communications on the subject beginning "Messrs. Printers."

"The feast of vultures and the waste of life," had no allurement for Captain Duncanson, although bred in alarum of war; that is a reason he decided on a second thought to spare his antagonist; another is, the unfairness of the unequal matching, he with his military training and his armory of swords and guns and a title. So he declared for arbitration.

"I now publicly make the following proposal. Let a court of honor be called of the most respectable characters in Georgetown

and Alexandria, when if I do not prove that he acted either like a coward or scoundrel in the late duel between us . . . ; then I will give James Greenleaf any satisfaction he may think proper to ask."

Whereupon, Greenleaf, too dense to comprehend Duncanson's kindly motives asserts:

"That his proposal about calling a court of honor, must appear to every individual, who has read my strictures and his answer to be a ridiculous subterfuge, under which he would gladly hide his cowardice and shelter himself from the contempt of his quondam friends."

Duncanson loaned Nicholson, individually, \$25,361.90. It was a permanent loan.

Another purchase of magnitude was that from Morris and Nicholson, October 26, 1796 in conjunction with William Deakins, Junior, and Uriah Forrest, at a consideration of \$50,000.

Mr. Ray, Mr. James Ray, was an arrant knave. He had, the characteristic means for the end, a sunshine smile, a smooth tongue, the sagacity of the serpent and the civility of a courtier.

Mr. Ray hailed from Newark-on-the-Trent. He arrived from England at New York, April, 1795. He intended, so he says, merely to stop over on his return to India. And, too, he says his fortune was from £30,000 to £40,000 sterling, and that Captain Duncanson induced him to remain and invest. Mr. Ray resided most of the time at Lamberton, New Jersey.

Captain Duncanson and Mr. Ray formed a firm, April 16, 1796, for a general line of mercantile agency and commission business with the principal place at Philadelphia and a branch at Washington and correspondents in New York and Baltimore. The circular, dated May 1, 1796, reads:

"From our long residence and connections formed at Bengal and at Bombay we presume to hope for the encouragement and patronage of our friends in that quarter, at the same time we look forward with much satisfaction to a more extensive intercourse and a free trade to the East Indies now open and allowed by treaty with Great Britain."

The Washington Branch was in Georgetown. The ventures were "not in one bottom trusted" and besides the *Mount Vernon* was the *Atlantic*. The firm's ledgers designate all attempts to gain fortune's favor as "adventures."

THE WASHINGTON GAZETTE

That the partnership lately subsisting between William Mayne Duncanson and James Ray, at this city and the city of Washington, merchants, under the firm of Duncanson and Ray, was this day dissolved by mutual consent. The business will be carried on in the future by W. M. Duncanson, at the said city of Washington.

W. M. DUNCANSON,
JAMES RAY.

Philadelphia, 13th June 1797.

Campbell vs. Duncanson and Ray. This is a cause in the High Court of Chancery, Maryland. It began September 28, 1797, and ran into 1809. Its record requires 420 pages. Campbell was represented by Philip Barton Key, John M. Gantt and J. T. Mason; Ray by William Cranch, subsequently, by Luther Martin; Duncanson in *propria persona*. Duncanson prepared his own answers, exhibits, interrogations and attended the sessions; at the finish, John Law is entered as his attorney. Perplexing intrigue everywhere appears. Duncanson and Ray believing in special advantages arising from an American bottom purchased from Willing and Francis, Philadelphia merchants, agents of the owner Thomas Murgatroyd, the

Delaware, then at the wharf, for \$40,000. Duncanson made the negotiation and gave the firm notes which he signed for the entire consideration. The negotiation began upon the formation of the firm, Duncanson and Ray, but held up a month or so to permit the expiration of Duncanson's citizenship proceeding. Duncanson renamed the ship, the *Mount Vernon*. In May, the *Mount Vernon* was loaded with rum by the firms, Duncanson and Ray, Willing and Francis, for London; ship and cargo were insured. About June 1, the ship set sail and when a short time out was by the French captured and condemned. The firm, Willing and Francis, from its anxiety to secure a statement from Duncanson of agency was evidently committed to Murgatroyd. The insurers claimed the insured was an alien. The plot evolved so many points as to suggest a star of endless points. Every one to the affair endeavored to evade responsibility and resorted to every expedient without scruple. Of all the proficient in prevarication, Ray was the prize-winner. From the Chancellor's conclusion in Campbell against Duncanson it appears as now narrated. The artful and cunning Ray devised pretexts to prevent the enforcement from him of the payment of the firm's notes for the luckless *Mount Vernon*; he represented to Duncanson the only means for the firm to effect an escape was to deny that he, Ray, had any share in it then he would be a disinterested witness and could testify so as to defeat any action; and he drafted a letter for Duncanson to sign which at first he declined to do, yet upon the approval of a lawyer of high repute did so after alterations. Ray with this advantage meditated a scheme to secure all of Duncanson's realty. He represented to Duncanson that all he had in the world would be attached for the partnership debt unless he conveyed his property in trust and suggested a deed in fee to his sister, Miss Duncanson, accordingly unapprised of Ray's arti-

fice he made the deed to shield from impending ruin without acknowledging or recording it. The very next day came the sequent step in the scheme. Ray next represented to Duncanson that his sister was unaccustomed to business and ought not to be subjected to alarm and disquietude and recommended another deed be made and to him to be retained by Duncanson. The second deed was signed and Ray managed to have at hand the authorized officer to take acknowledgments, Duncanson put the deed in the closet with his other papers. Ray lodged with Duncanson and at an opportune moment surreptitiously abstracted the deed and then recorded it. When Duncanson was in Philadelphia, Ray spread the report his partner had forged the firm's paper, had compromised by a conveyance to him, and had absconded. Duncanson, March 13 or 14, 1797, discovered the theft and threatened Ray with exposure and thereupon, March 15, the latter made a written declaration of right to re-conveyance upon adjustment of the firm's finances. Ray was the debtor to the firm.

Duncanson and Law quarreled. Morris gives an account of the quarrel.

Phil^a Dec^r 4, 1796

W^m M. DUNCANSON, ESQ^r.,

DEAR SIR:

I cannot but feel very great Concern at seeing by the Contents of your letter of the 28ult that M^r Law and you are come to a serious Dispute about the Bargain verbally made between you respecting his Property in the City of Washington. I remember well that you told me the next day that as M^r Westcott M^r Law & yourself were going home from the little Hotel where we had dined together, M^r Law broke out into some degrading Expressions respecting the City and those Persons he had to deal with about his Property in it—you mentioned some observations of M^r Westcott made to M^r Law, after which you said that you charged M^r Law with having formed a Design

of going to England, and concluded with making him an offer of £75,000 for the Property which cost him £50,000, & the price of his improvements at a fair Valuation payable in ten years with ten pcent interest payable annually and to give the whole of his and as much of your own Property as should be deemed reasonable security for the payment of Principal and In^t, that you told him the In^t would amount to more than he would expend in England or anywhere else, that M^r Law asked what was to be done in case the Interest should not be punctually paid, You answered that he might appoint a Friend to receive it with Powers to sell as much of the Property as might be needful in case of delinquency & that M^r Law said it was a Bargain &c—I do not recollect perfectly some other particulars which you mentioned respecting the Houses to be built, but I know that a Gent^a asked you afterwards to admit him to a Concern if the Bargain was seriously made, and I also remembre that a day or two afterwards when M^r Law and yourself came in the forenoon into Room at the Union Tavern at George Town, you took me out leaving Gen^l Forrest and M^r Law in the room & upon our Return M^r Law said to you “Duncanson it is not right that you and I should be making Bargains and buying & selling each other Property, we have been long friendly, crossed the sea together and we must drop this Bargain”—I do not recollect precisely your reply, but I think it did not consent to drop the Bargain altho’ I confess I expected from that Overture that you would in the end give it up—The Conversations here recited I have mentioned several times since which served to fix them on my memory, and I only related them to shew yours & M^r Laws opinions as to the value of Washington Lots—upon the whole if M^r Law wishes to go for England to remain there, I should wish you to be the Purchaser of his Property, but if he desires to stay and fulfill his Contract I must say that I am desirous that he should do so, this however is for you and him, & not for me to determine.

I read to Mrs. Morris and Maria that part of your letter which relates to them—Maria says she fears the weather may be too warm for racing through the Pennsylvania avenue when she comes there, but she will be glad to take a View of the avenue and then to run or walk through it according to Circumstances—

They both join me in Comp^{ts} & good Wishes to Miss Duncanson and yourself—I am truly

Your faithful friend & St.

ROBT. MORRIS.

Phil^a, Dec^r 11, 1796

Mr. Morris meets Mr. Ray in Philadelphia a day or two after his letter to Captain Duncanson and finds "that the dispute between Law and Duncanson runs high" and his pacific nature prompts him to assume the position of peacemaker.

THOMAS LAW, ESQ^r

DEAR SIR:

I am extremely sorry to hear of any Differences between Mr Duncanson & you—Old Friends if they do happen to quarrel must make up again and I hope that has or will soon take place between you before this time—Mrs. Morris and Maria present Compts. to Mrs. Law and yourself in which I join with the Promise of visiting the City next Summer—I always think of it and my Friends in and near it with Pleasure.

I am Dear Sir Yrs.

ROBT. MORRIS.

Duncanson and Law by arbitration bonds (June 28, 1798) referred their financial disputes to John Mason, James M. Lingan and Tobias Lear who awarded Duncanson, July 31, 1798, \$1817.64.

Captain Duncanson is in the first chapter of the sugar house history. At Piercy's father's place in England, Duncanson, 1782, met him. Piercy in New York with a capitalist undertook the manufacture of sugar; misfortune to the latter caused a collapse of the enterprise. Piercy, although already acquainted as said, secured from England commendatory letters to Duncanson who assisted him financially, lodged him and Mrs. Piercy in his home and planned for a refinery to be promoted by himself and Tench Ringgold and operated by Piercy on the site where it was eventually located. The refinery was built by

Law and managed by Piercy. It was at the southern end of New Jersey avenue. Mr. Ringgold who became prominent in local concerns was a protégé of the Captain.

Captain Duncanson coöperated with Mr. Law in furthering the Washington Canal and also guaranteed the lottery prizes. From May 31 to August 18, 1796, he accounted for 432 tickets at ten dollars each.

He was an incorporator in the Eastern Branch Bridge Company under An Act of the Maryland Assembly.

Captain Duncanson leased through Mr. Cranch the mansion No. 470 N street, southwest, while his residence on Capitol Hill was being built, 1795-'6. It was provided with coach house and stable. The footwalks, front and rear, were paved with brick. Here the Captain sported the style his wealth warranted.

From *Greenleaf and Law in the Federal City* is taken this description:

“Distantly eastward from the Capitol and northward from the Anacostia in the wilds Captain Duncanson had cleared the shrub and a space and had run from the cornerstones the lines preparatory for his mansion. William Lovering was the architect and furnished the material. With the summer of 1796 began the Captain's occupation. Although charmingly sequestered in profuse wood, from the portico he could catch the sheen of the wide waters beyond the slope. The Captain's domain was an ample city square and imitated a prosperous English estate; it yet remains in entirety with the mansion well preserved, now as then, a scene of beauty. These honey-locusts of broken boughs and hollowed boles lend

The grace of forest-woods decayed;

and “yclad with summer's pride” hath been a hundred times and more; and are the contemporaries of the ancient mansion. The locust trees, maybe, when saplings were planted by the Captain and gratefully grew to lofty stature to spread over him an arcade of shade with their arms branching in graceful

sprays of pinnate leaves. The mansion is correct colonial and suggests Grecian culture by its triangular pediment adorned with window, central and circular. It marks the taste of the Captain as does his affluence the quarters for his equipage.

Still it is sylvan scene; still the manor-house, has its pristine strength though marked with the credentials of a century. It is a joy to the antiquaries of historic proclivity. Now "the Maples," it is the home of Mrs. Emily Edson Briggs, of literary fame, *Olivia*."

The square is designated 875 and is bounded by South Carolina avenue, D, Sixth and Seventh streets, southeast. The eastern wing was added by an intermediate owner, Senator John M. Clayton of Delaware; the western wing is also an addition.

George Walker lived in his own mansion, on A near First street, northeast, where afterwards was the Old Capitol prison. He was a Scot, born at Falkirk. He had a tobasco temper and an intemperate tongue. He had been wronged by the city commissioners and it gave trial to the temper and tongue. From his to the Captain's mansion was the straight path along the Pennsylvania Avenue. That he went to the Captain's to relate his grievances might be; or a more peaceable mission. George was a recent widower and he would again taste the sweets of wedlock; and he aimed to have the lovely Martha his second "best gift to man." Yes, he came a-wooing. Did she think or even say:

"Your boldness I with admiration see;
What hope had you to gain a queen like me?"

Dryden

Sufficient is recorded to warrant the writing, Miss Martha Duncanson was a woman of bright mind, and engaging manner. The gallant and amiable, Robert Morris, to the Captain writes, November 22, 1796:

"I pray you to present me most respectfully to Miss Duncanson whose attentions I shall ever remember with gratitude as I shall with pleasure the marks of your Friendship."

Miss Duncanson died August, 1799.

With declining wealth and loss of woman companionship Captain Duncanson built an humble home in the centre of square 300 on the high Potomac bank near Thirteenth street in 1800 and there with his young motherless children lived out his remaining days.

Duncanson was a Republican. His political reputation was beyond the local limits. His associates were of those of national fame.

The first local election was attended with extraordinary excitement. Appeals for favorite candidates were made in the public prints. Preliminary caucuses in different sections were held to select "fit characters." The citizens of the west end chose among its number of candidates, Captain Duncanson. The election was on June 9, 1802. Political and sectional differences, splitting and scratching, produced a mixed result. The Captain received a respectable vote of the suffragists and continued to have Captain instead of Honorable on his letters.¹

¹The twelve elected are in first column. Republicans in *italics*; federals plain

<i>Daniel Carroll</i>	204	<i>George Hatfield</i>	97
<i>George Blagden</i>	202	<i>Joseph Hodgson</i>	96
<i>James Barry</i>	164	<i>Thomas Tingey</i>	96
<i>William Brent</i>	157	<i>Henry Ingle</i>	95
<i>Benjamin More</i>	129	<i>C. Coningham</i>	89
<i>James Hoban</i>	124	<i>Griffith Coombe</i>	87
<i>Nicholas King</i>	124	<i>Thomas Henry</i>	80
<i>A. B. Woodward</i>	123	<i>Wm. M. Duncanson</i>	79
<i>S. H. Smith</i>	121	<i>George Andrews</i>	78
<i>William Prout</i>	120	<i>Peter Lenox</i>	60
<i>Thomas Peter</i>	115	<i>John Kearney</i>	58
<i>John Hewitt</i>	98		

This extract and letter is from the *History of the Library of Congress* by William Dawson Johnston, vol. 1, p. 44.

"The death of John Beckley, April 8, 1807, left the office of Librarian of Congress vacant. With respect to this vacancy President Jefferson wrote to the Secretary of War, Henry Dearborn, April 21, 1807: 'With respect to the office of Librarian, I have thought it best generally to give it to the Clerk of the House of Representatives, who being dependent on the House is of course, bound to be complaisant to the members. In the present case I am strongly disposed to depart from the rule in favor of William Mayne Duncanson. He was in the very worst days of terror one of the four or five who alone stood their ground as Republicans in Washington and Georgetown. He is, I think, a very honest man, came here a very wealthy one, has been swindled out of his whole property and now is in real distress. He is warm in his temper, and on account of some communications with Colonel Smith in Miranda's affair and perhaps some acquaintance with Burr might, I fear be rather unpopular with the members. But my confidence is that he might be and has been an honest man in all his purposes. I am a little puzzled therefore, between doubt and inclination."

Like the others the Captain's fortune became impaired, and, March, 1802, he inserted a modest notice in the *Intelligencer* of "lots for sale or on ground rent between the President's house and the Navy Yard, the price moderate and payments easy," but none came to buy or rent.

Captain Duncanson when he came to America had a fortune. He invested with the syndicate, as appears, over seventy thousand dollars. The real estate speculation was a complete failure. His mercantile ventures were unsuccessful. Misfortune closely followed misfortune. To business reverse came broken health. He neither mismanaged nor overspent, he was the victim of ill fate.

There is pathos in the Duncanson deeds in the old time libers. They tell a true story of embarrassment and then

of pinching poverty, more and more poignant. First is mortgage of real estate, then mortgage of equity. After a chattel trust with inventory of everything—mahogany and silverware; family and other pictures, twenty-six; a pair of pistols and three swords. Then, a bill of sale and thereto the same inventory repeated item by item and added before overlooked,

A COACH.

The old coach out in the yard, disused and decayed, the suggestion of style and splendor of better days.

In George Watterston's unpublished manuscript for a history of the city of Washington is this:

"In connection with Mr Law I am reminded of another Englishman Capn. Duncanson who also arrived from India at the same time and whose fate was a melancholy one. He held the rank of a Captain in the British army, and both he and Mr L—were said to have come to this country to avoid being witnesses in the memorable trial of Warren Hastings. This gentleman branched out largely upon his arrival in the infant Metropolis, then almost a wilderness—drove a carriage and four horses and built a fine house in the woods between the Capitol Hill and Navy Yard and lived with a lady who was said to be his sister, in considerable splendor. He had brought with him, it was believed a handsome fortune, but it seemed to dwindle away rapidly, and, after various unsuccessful attempts to regain what he had wasted in extravagant living, he sank into a state of absolute penury, and was finally borne to an obscure grave by a single attendant—the cartman who conveyed his body to its resting place— "Unwept, unhonored and unsung."

Mr. Watterston is in error; neither Law nor Duncanson had any connection with Lord Hastings. If the comment on Duncanson is an index it is well Mr. Watterston's efforts had not public light.

The Captain was survived by his children. Charles Coltman Duncanson, an auctioneer, and William Mayne Duncanson, a physician, are of the descendants. He died the early part of 1812. No mention of his death in print is found.

That voyage of life was rough ; the last scene a wreck.